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ABSTRACT

Fifth and sixth grade students of the University School at the University of Wyoming participated in a successful week's overnight outdoor experience in September 1983. Because results of a pre-camp questionnaire indicated that most students had minimal knowledge of the planning necessary for camping, activities and classes were organized to furnish the students with the skills needed to plan and help direct a family camping trip. On the pre-camp questionnaire, students felt that equipment and supplies were important, as were certain camping skills such as building a fire and pitching a tent, and that the trip's success depended upon weather, health and safety, fun, and several other factors. On the post-camp questionnaire, students felt that transportation, location of camp and camp-site, and weather were also significant factors in trip success, as were additional camping skills and experience. They felt an increased sense that trip success depended upon health and safety, verbal thanks, and learning. As a result of their camping activities, participating students provided for their families a trip guide that contained road and travel information, menus, shopping lists, equipment lists, and suggested activities. The report includes guidelines for planning and managing similar outdoor education programs. (SB)

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A Kid's Guide to Family Camping

Outdoor education programs are among the cherished traditions and valuable learning experiences at University School. The outdoor programs encompass a two-day, day camp experience for grades one and two; a three-day, day camp for grades three and four; a week's overnight outdoor education experience for grades five and six; and a ten-day science trip to a variety of national parks, national monuments, and points of natural science interest for seventh, eighth and ninth graders who are members of "Science Club". The scope of this paper focuses on the week's camping experience for grades five and six.

During the later part of September students in grades five and six set out on a memorable adventure in the Snowy Range area of the Medicine Bow National Forest. This is the beginning of a week of group living, working, and learning. Teachers and other adult supervisors (volunteers: University students, parents, and friends, and guests with particular talents needed in the camping skills and academic program) accompany the students into the outdoor living area.

Much of the scheduling and planning follows an established format. The academic program also follows a two-year plan which ensures that students will be exposed to a wide variety of suitable subject matter in the out-of-doors setting. Flexibility of the program allows for activities of current interest.

The idea for "A Kid's Guide to Family Camping" evolved from an impression that children are rarely involved in the planning of family trips. A survey of our students revealed that 78% had been camping with their family. Further questions indicated, however, that students had

a minimum of general knowledge of the planning necessary for camping.

As a result of this pre-camp questionnaire, activities and classes were planned for the 5/6 grade outdoor experience which would furnish the students skills to plan and help direct a family camping trip.

When asked the most important areas to consider when planning a camping trip for their families, pre and post camp questionnaires indicated that students consistently felt equipment and supplies were important. Equipment such as tents, sleeping bags, proper clothing, and cooking and eating utensils seemed of primary importance. Supplies such as food and water were also of foremost consideration. Post camp revealed that students had developed a concern for choosing a camping site and where they should plan to go. After camp they had also developed a concern with transportation, time of year and weather conditions and cost.

Students were asked how they would decide what activities to include when they go camping. While a few students prior to camp suggested talking with family or another person and reading reference books, other suggestions ranged from flipping a coin, doing what you want to do, to drawing straws. Post camp students strongly supported talking with an experienced camper, talking with their family and deciding what the family would like. Other post camp consideration of significance were weather and the area in which the family would be camping, and reading books about camping.

Activities that the students would like to do when they go camping showed no significant changes before and after camp. Favorite activities included hiking, fishing, swimming. Other activities of particular interest were sight-seeing, horseback riding, cooking, reading and a variety of sports activities.

Previous to camp students indicated that the following skills would be necessary/important for a successful trip: knowing how to build a fire, pitch a tent, cook, knowledge of survival skills and first aid. Post camp, students added knowing how to use a Coleman stove, how to read a map, picking a camp site and setting up camp to the list of important skills. The students feel confident they can perform these skills by themselves or with some supervision.

Pre camp, judging the success of the trip was dependent on the weather, health and safety of the family, fun and enjoyment, verbal thanks and feeling that the trip went well and was worthwhile. Post camp judgement of success included the previous items with and increase in concern for health and safety and verbal approval or thanks for a well planned trip. Other measures of success were that things went as planned, that something was learned, and there was discussion about the trip with plans to go again.

Based on the information from the pre camp questionnaire activities were designed to provide students with the skills they would need to organize and execute a camping trip. The end product of these activities was a trip guide provided by the student for the family to follow. This guide required family discussion on where and when to go, activities to include, and budget limitations. The guide contains road and travel information including camp site information, menu, and shopping lists, personal and camp equipment lists, and suggestions for activities. Parents were asked to use the plan and furnish requested feedback. The follow-up will be completed during the fall of 1984.

The following briefly presents the basics of planning and managing an outdoor education program, activities in the out-of-doors, and the foundation for "A Kid's Guide to Family Camping" project.

Basics of planning and managing an outdoor education program.

Administrative Planning

A. Get the support of the principal, cooperating teachers, support personnel, parents and parent group, and the school board.

B. When choosing a time take into consideration weather, school and community calendar, and hunting season.

C. In selecting a site be sure to consider availability of water, bathrooms, and shelters. Know the enviroment you will need. Be aware of trails; know where they go, their distance, and the time needed to complete the trail.

D. Transportation arrangements, made in advance, should be confirmed. Be sure to check on insurance. If travel will be in private cars make passenger assignments and assign first and last positions to people who know where you are going.

E. Correspondence is vital. Be sure to send letters home with pertinent information. Confirm any reservations that are necessary.

F. Financing of the program is critical. Decisions must be made on cost, who will pay, and how the money is collected. A record keeping system is important.

G. Staff considerations should include teacher/student ratio, parents as activity leaders, other community resource people, and a nurse or someone knowledgeable in first aid.

H. Equipment lists should be well planned and done for individual/personal needs, group/camp use (i.e. cooking and fire building), and educational needs (i.e. books, posters, and arts and crafts supplies).

I. Meals are important (almost the focal point of the day). A menu should be made out for each meal and a shopping list prepared from the menu.

J. Ask the local newspaper to do a story on the program. Offer pictures and a write up if necessary.

K. Be sure to notify the local law enforcement agencies of where camp will be located and ask them to drop by (especially if camping overnight).

L. Nothing can take the place of good pre-planning. Continually evaluate plans during the camp and make adjustments as necessary. Sit down with the staff post camp and evaluate each phase, make written comments and refer to them next year. Ask the students to evaluate the program.

Management

A. Establish a group gathering signal. A whistle, bell or blasts on a car horn work well. Attendance should be taken often.

B. Give a group orientation. Establish boundaries. Set down camp rules and consequences.

C. A schedule is important. Try to run as close to schedule as possible. Consider the time needed for each activity. An alternate plan is needed in case of weather problems or "no show" of an instructor.

D. After scheduling groups, double check making sure the schedule works and all children are involved at all times and in all phases of the program.

E. Grouping can be centered around academic activities, camp chores, special interest, and many other areas. Personalities should be an important consideration if groups are to go smoothly.

F. With overnight camp, home sickness could present problems--be prepared.

G. Day campers will be hungry as soon as they get to the site. Remind them to bring a snack or prepare one for them.

H. Proper equipment is critical to any successful experience. Be sure campers know what to bring. Poor equipment maintenance will meet with disasterous consequences.

I. Cleanup is a daily activity. Campers should realize the impact they have on themselves and the environment. They should be involved in maintaining the site and the equipment.

J. Animals in the wild are only for observation. Cows, dogs, skunks, racoons, porcupines, and bats could cause damage to people and/or equipment.

K. Everyone (student and staff) should understand their responsibilities. Outdoor education should be a expedition, not a sea cruise.

Program

Activities in the out-of-doors run the gamut from camping and out door living skills, to math, language arts, social studies, biological sciences, ecology, and earth sciences. Health and physical education, arts, crafts, music and quiet time are also easy to include in a program.

At the end of the week's activities involving group living, working, and learning, not only are our academic and camping skill goals realized, but another goal, that of the affective domain as a result of group living and working together has been accomplished. Although many skills have been gained, participants seem to value the comradery developed between students, students and adults, and between adults,

as one of the most beneficial outgrowths of the experience. When the many weary, but satisfied, participants depart their out-of-door home a new sense of accomplishment prevails. Not only have the participants been able to cope with the experience, but they have gained many valuable skills; they have been successfully involved in numerous academic pursuits suited to or enhanced by the out-of-doors; they have developed camping skills. The positive experience carries over into the classroom strengthening the many academic areas introduced during the week's outing and proves to have a positive effect on interpersonal relationships within the classroom. We hope the responsibility, pride, and comradery will extend into the family relationship when each student shares his/her planned camping trip with the family group.